

The Big Book on Forgiveness

Our Big Book (Alcoholics Anonymous) has a great deal to say about resentments and forgiveness. Enjoy.

Harboring Resentments is Fatal

We are reluctant to repeat the book.

However, some of the points it makes cannot be left without comment: If we were to read page 66 again, we would note the power of resentment far exceeds any conception we had of negative thinking. Were you aware that:

*...a life which includes deep resentment leads
only to futility and unhappiness.*

The hours in which we allow futility and unhappiness in our lives are not worthwhile. Resentments waste our lives.

Resentments shut us off from the sunlight of the Spirit, thereby preventing the maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience.

When shadowed from the sunlight of the Spirit, the insanity of alcohol returns, we drink again, and we die.

Harboring of resentments is fatal.

Yet, it must be done! There is striking evidence that resentment creates a physical poison in our bodies in addition to the mental and spiritual maladies it feeds.

Eradicating Resentments

How do we rid ourselves of resentments? Hopefully, this process began in step Four. Our list holds the key.

Note the message of the column headings in our inventory:

Column #1) **Who** do you hold a grudge against?

Column #2) **What** did they do that you found offensive?

Column #3) **How** did you contribute to their action? (what is *your* part?) and

Column #4) **Why** did you react with a resentment?

The first lesson is that resentments cannot be cleared up until we know we have them and why. The second lesson is that we have made ourselves vulnerable to the outside world to an extraordinary extent. Our entire self-concept has been molded by the opinions and actions of others, and our old thinking as to what we ought to be and were.

Next, it is necessary to be willing to let go of the resentment. You will learn more about this in Step Six. Moreover (and the Big Book doesn't give as much help here as it might), we must forgive the person we resent. There will be more discussion of forgiving others in Step Eight. Just accept right now that you are going to have to do it! There is no other course.

The ultimate key given you in the Big Book is the oft repeated notion that your life is now on a different basis. A basis is a foundation – that upon which all the rest stands. Your new basis is trusting and relying upon God.

The Art of Forgiveness

Reprinted from the Big Book (Alcoholics Anonymous) and the 12th & 12

We cannot be helpful to all people, but at least God will show us how to take a kindly and tolerant view of each and every one. Referring to our list again. Putting out of our minds the wrongs others had done, we resolutely looked for our own mistakes. Where had we been selfish, dishonest, self-seeking, and frightened? Though a situation had not been entirely our fault, we tried to disregard the other person involved entirely. Where were we to blame? The inventory was ours, not the other man's.

[Big Book, page 67, line 11]

If we are sorry for what we have done, and have the honest desire to let God take us to better things, we believe we will be forgiven and will have learned our lesson. If we are not sorry, and our conduct continues to harm others, we are quite sure to drink. We are not theorizing. These are facts out of our experience.

[Big Book, page 70, line 8]

The question of how to approach the man we hated will arise. It may be he had done us more harm than we have done him and, though we may have acquired a better attitude toward him, we are still not too keen about admitting our faults. Nevertheless, with a person we dislike, we take the bit in our teeth. It is harder to go to an enemy than to a friend, but we find it much more beneficial to us. We go to him in a helpful and forgiving spirit, confessing our former ill feeling and expressing our regret.

Under no condition do we criticize such a person or argue.

[Big Book, page 77, line 18]

When we retire at night, we constructively review our day. Were we resentful, selfish, dishonest, or afraid? Do we owe an apology? Have we kept something to ourselves which should be discussed with another person at once? Were we kind and loving toward all? What could we have done better? Were we thinking of ourselves most of the time? Or were we thinking of what we could do for others, of what we could pack into the stream of life? But we must be careful not to drift into worry, remorse or morbid reflections, for that would diminish our usefulness to others. After making our review we ask God's forgiveness and inquire what corrective measures should be taken.

[Big Book, page 86, line 5]

Step Five

This vital Step was also the means by which we began to get the feeling that we could be forgiven, no matter what we had thought or done. Often it was while working on this Step with our sponsors or spiritual advisers that we first felt truly able to forgive others, no matter how deeply we felt they had wronged us. Our moral inventory had persuaded us that all-round forgiveness was desirable, but it was only when we resolutely tackled Step Five that we inwardly knew we'd be able to receive forgiveness and give it, too.

[12th & 12, page 57]

These obstacles, however, are very real. The first, and one of the most difficult, has to do with forgiveness. The moment we ponder a twisted or broken relationship with another person, our emotions go on the defensive. To escape looking at the wrongs we have done another, we resentfully focus on the wrong he has done us. This is especially true if he

has, in fact, behaved badly at all. Triumphantly we seize upon his misbehavior as the perfect excuse for minimizing or forgetting our own.

Right here we need to fetch ourselves up sharply. It doesn't make much sense when a real tosspot calls a kettle black. Let's remember that alcoholics are not the only ones bedeviled by sick emotions. Moreover, it is usually a fact that our behavior when drinking has aggravated the defects of others. We've repeatedly strained the patience of our best friends to a snapping point, and have brought out the very worst in those who didn't think much of us to begin with. In many instances we are really dealing with fellow sufferers, people whose woes we have increased. If we are now about to ask forgiveness for ourselves, why shouldn't we start out by forgiving them, one and all?

[12 & 12, page 78]

Step Eight

We shall want to hold ourselves to the course of admitting the things we have done, meanwhile forgiving the wrongs done us, real or fancied. We should avoid extreme judgments, both of ourselves and of others involved. We must not exaggerate our defects or theirs. A quiet, objective view will be our steadfast aim. . [12 & 12, page 81] In all these situations we need self-restraint, honest analysis of what is involved, a willingness to admit when the fault is ours, and an equal willingness to forgive when the fault is elsewhere. . [12 & 12, page 91] ...that where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of forgiveness ... It is by forgiving that one is forgiven.

[12 & 12, page 99]

Then he asked for the grace to bring love, forgiveness, harmony, truth, faith, hope,

light, and joy to every human being he could.

[12 & 12, page 101]

He thought it better to give comfort than to receive it; better to understand than to be understood; better to forgive than to be forgiven. .

[12 & 12, page 101]

At last, acceptance proved to be the key to my drinking problem. After I had been around AA for seven months, tapering off alcohol and pills, not finding the program working very well, I was finally able to say, "Okay, God. It is true that I--of all people, strange as it may seem, and even though I didn't give my permission--really, really am an alcoholic of sorts. And it's all right with me. Now, what am I going to do about it?" When I stopped living in the problem and began living in the answer, the problem went away. From that moment on, I have not had a single compulsion to drink.

And acceptance is the answer to all my problems today. When I am disturbed, it is because I find some person, place, thing, or situation--some fact of my life -- unacceptable to me, and I can find no serenity until] I accept that person, place, thing, or situation as being exactly the way it is supposed to be at this moment. Nothing, absolutely nothing happens in God's world by mistake. Until I could accept my alcoholism, I could not stay sober; unless I accept life completely on life's terms, I cannot be happy. I need to concentrate not so much on what needs to be changed in the world as on what needs to be changed in me and in my attitudes. .

[Big Book, page 448]

One morning, however, I realized I had to get rid of it, for my reprieve was running out, and if I didn't get rid of it I was going to get drunk--and I didn't want to get drunk any more. In my prayers that morning I

asked God to point out to me some way to be free of this resentment. During the day a friend of mine brought me some magazines to take to a hospital group I was interested in, and I looked through them and a "banner" across the front of one featured an article by a prominent clergyman in which I caught the word resentment

He said, in effect: "If you have a resentment you want to be free of, if you will pray for the person or the thing that you resent, you will be free. If you will ask in prayer for everything you want for yourself to be given to them, you will be free. Ask for their health, their prosperity, their happiness, and you will be free. Even when you don't really want it for them, and your prayers are only words and you don't mean it, go ahead and do it anyway. Do it every day for two weeks and you will find you have come to mean it and to want it for them and you will realize that where you used to feel bitterness and resentment and hatred, you now feel compassionate understanding and love."

It worked for me then, and it has worked for me many times since, and it will work for me every time I am willing to work it. Sometimes I have to ask first for the willingness, but it too always comes. Because it works for me, it will work for all of us. As another great man says, "The only real freedom a human being can ever know is doing what you ought to do because you want to do it."

This great experience that released me from the bondage of hatred and replaced it with love is really just another affirmation of the truth I know: I get everything I need in Alcoholics Anonymous everything I need I get--and when I get what I need I invariably find that it was just what I wanted all the time. .

[Big Book, page 552]